

Message Text

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ORIGIN SS-25

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FM SECSTATE WASHDC

TO COMSIXTHFLT

CINCUSNAVEUR PRIORITY

S E C R E T STATE 019155

EXDIS MILITARY ADDRESSEES HANDLE AS SPECAT EXCLUSIVE

FOL RPT NOUAKCHOTT 178 ACTION SECSTATE INFO ALGIERS AMMAN
MADRID RABAT 26 JAN.

QUOTE

S E C R E T NOUAKCHOTT 0178

EXDIS

DEPT PASS COMSIXTHFLT AND CINCUSNAVEUR

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PBOR MOPS MR SS

SUBJECT: SAHARA WATCH: REPORT OF MOROCCAN F-5 DOWN IN MAURITANIA

REF: RABAT 374, AMMAN 389

1. ACTING MINISTER OF STATE FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS (AND MINSTATE
FOR NATIONAL ECONOMY) SIDI 'ABDALLAHI MADE SPECIAL POINT OF TEL-
LING ME MORNING JANUARY 24 THAT MAURITANIAN GOVERNMENT COULD NOT
RPT NOT CONFIRM MOROCCAN REPORT THAT ROYAL AIR FORCE FIGHTER AIR-
CRAFT HAD BEEN DOWNED IN MAURITANIAN TERRITORY DURING BATTLE AT
'AIN BIN TILLI. MINISTER DECLARED GIRM WAS AWARE THAT KING

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HASSAN HAD INFORMED FRENCH GOVERNMENT AND VISITING COMSIXTHFLT

OF LOSS OF FIGHTER BY MISSILE FIRE, AND THAT VOICE OF AMERICA HAD ALREADY CARRIED MOROCCAN REPORT ON NEWSCASTS. (JANUARY 26 BBC WORLD SERVICE NEWS REPEATED STORY OF FIGHTER DOWN IN MAURITANIAN TERRITORY TOGETHER WITH GOM INTERPRETATION OF LOSS AS "PROOF" OF FOREIGN INTERVENTION.) AFTER EXPLAINING THAT GIRM HAD DECIDED AT OUTSET OF SAHARA CONFLICT TO LIMIT ITS PUBLIC ANNOUNCEMENTS TO FACTS IT COULD PROVE OR COULD DEMONSTRATE IN POSITIVE FASHION, MINISTER STATED THAT GIRM WANTED AMERICAN AMBASSADOR TO KNOW THAT GIRM HAD FOUND NO TRACE OF DOWNED MOROCCAN FIGHTER IN MAURITANIAN TERRITORY. WHILE NOTING THAT NORTHERN MAURITANIA CONSISTS OF IGE EXPANSES OF SELDOM-VISITED DESERT WHERE DOWNED FIGHTER MIGHT HAVE CRASHED, 'ABDALLAHI CLEARLY IMPLIED GIRM DID NOT EXPECT TO FIND MOROCCAN FIGHTER AIRCRAFT ANYWHERE IN MAURITANIA. MINISTER ALSO DECLARED THAT GIRM WAS UNWILLING TO USE REPORT OF SUCCESSFUL MISSILE ATTACK TO "PROVE" FOREIGN INTERVENTION, ALTHOUGH ONE COULD DEDUCE THAT ANY MISSILE WHICH MIGHT HAVE BEEN INVOLVED HAD COME FROM OUTSIDE NORTHWEST CORNER OF AFRICA AND PERSON WHO FIRED IT (OR HIS INSTRUCTOR) HAD BEEN TRAINED OUTSIDE AREA.

2. AT VIRTUALLY SAME MOMENT MORNING JANUARY 24, VICE CHIEF OF STAFF TOLD VISITING DATT THAT MOROCCANS HAD LOST T-6 (TWO-PLACE LIGHT RECON AIRCRAFT) AT 'AIN BIN TILLI, AND THAT AIRCRAFT HAD APPARENTLY BEEN BROUGHT DOWN BY SURFACE-TO-AIR MISSILE. VICE CHIEF ALSO DECLARED THAT GIRM HAD NO EVIDENCE WHATSOEVER TO CONFIRM ASSERTIONS OF SOVIET, CUBAN, OR OTHER FOREIGN INVOLVEMENT IN SAHARAN FIGHTING.

3. AM NOT ENTIRELY SURE WHAT WE SHOULD MAKE OF CONFLICTING MOROCCAN AND MAURITANIAN REPORTS OF AIR LOSSES AND VARIANTS IN INTERPRETATIVE COMMENT, BUT AT MINIMUM PRUDENCE WOULD SUGGEST THAT USG SHOULD NOT RPT NOT PUBLICLY REPEAT F-5 STORY UNTIL IT CAN BE CONFIRMED IN POSITIVE FASHION.HANDYSIDE

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